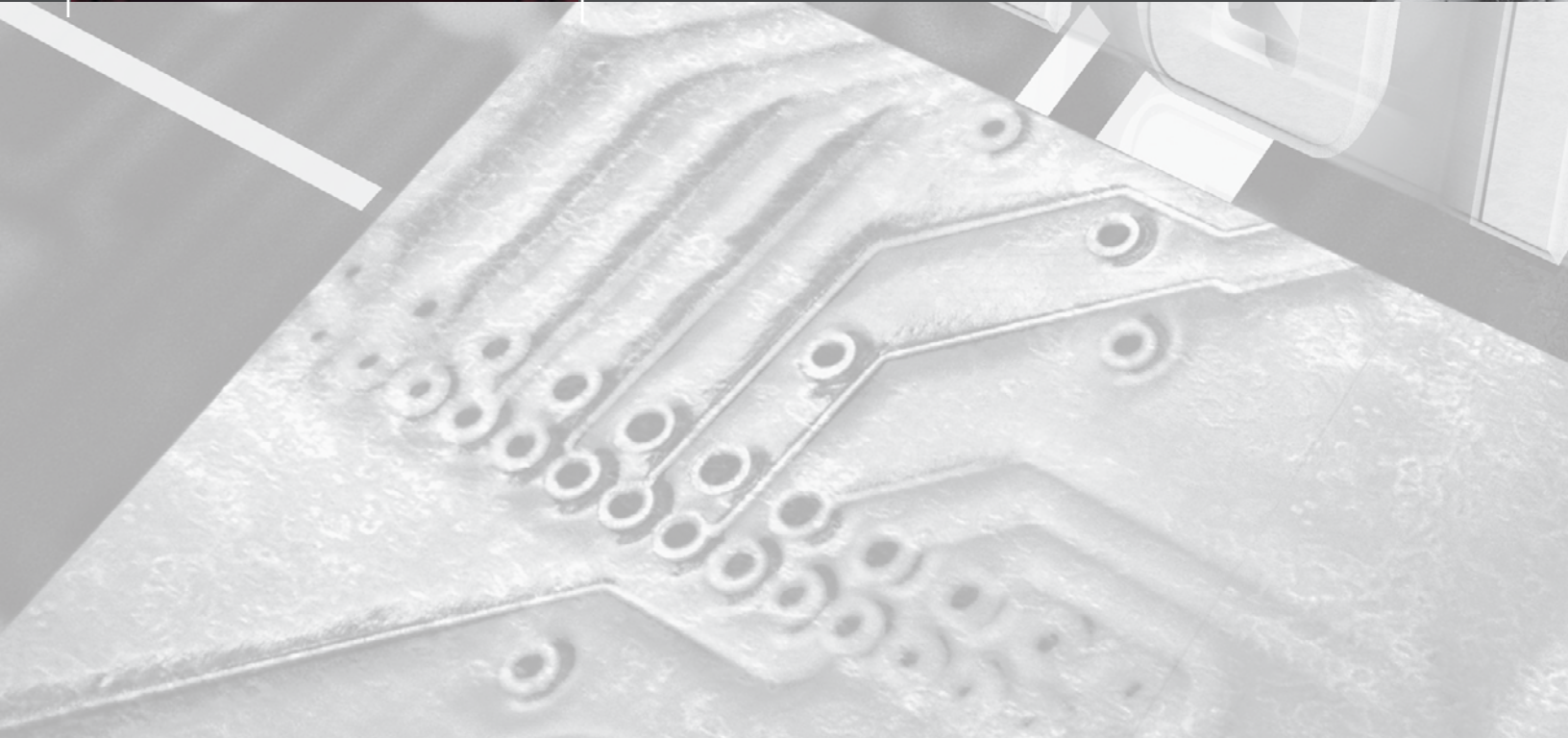




2007 Case Study Review of Inventor Assistance Organizations

**Georgia
Tech**  **Enterprise
Innovation
Institute**



2007 CASE STUDY REVIEW OF INVENTOR ASSISTANCE ORGANIZATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Prepared for

U.S. Economic Development Administration

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OVERVIEW

With the goal to build capacity for better competing in the global market, public and private entities all over the world are adopting new ways to identify their human capital and improve their economic productivity. The independent inventor can be a core part of that human capital base. However, the success of the independent inventor depends greatly on his/her access to support and assistance at all stages of the invention process: from product to market.¹

Through an effort sponsored by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovation Institute launched an effort in July 2006 to explore the potential for assisting the independent inventor through a new pilot program known as the Innovator Assistance Pilot ProgramSM. At the heart of this pilot program is the desire to advance productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurship among independent inventors and other individuals in Georgia communities.

The mission of the pilot is to gain a better understanding of (1) the unmet needs of the state's independent inventors, (2) ingredients that help to determine their success, (3) potential resources to help them, (4) effective practices in serving their needs, and (5) programmatic initiatives that could boost the potential for commercializing their products.

In 2007, the Georgia Tech team launched the first comprehensive survey ever conducted of Georgia independent inventors statewide. The survey was created to determine the unmet needs of the independent inventor, and crucial barriers to turning their inventions into profitable ventures. Georgia Tech's survey identifies some of these hurdles, and results from this survey can be found in the report of the *2007 Survey of Georgia's Independent Inventors*.

To further understand how to best serve the independent inventor, the team launched another effort in 2007 to investigate and case study Inventor Assistance Organizations (IAOs) throughout the United States. The purpose of this research investigation was to benchmark common and promising practices and to identify key challenges inherent in providing inventor-based services and programs, and it marked the first comprehensive research investigation of IAOs conducted in the United States.

¹ Meyer, M. "Individual Inventors, Entrepreneurial Activity and Public Support Measures." International Engineering Management Conference *IEEE* 2004: 219-223.

THE APPROACH

The Georgia Tech team conducted case study research to uncover common challenges and ingredients for success in serving independent inventors and helping them transform their inventions into successful ventures. The goal of this investigation was to ultimately determine *how* the participating Inventor Assistance Organizations (IAOs) were created, *why* they provide specific services and programs to independent inventors in their respective areas, and *how* and *to what degree* they have been able to help inventors be successful.

To identify IAOs throughout the United States, organizations included in the review had as part of its mission one or more of the following:

- Assist and / or educate independent inventors,
- Help inventors learn about the invention process,
- Provide business assistance to inventors who desire to be entrepreneurs and create small businesses to market their inventions / products, and/or
- Assist the inventors with other avenues to commercialization, such as licensing.

Some of the investigated IAOs had a primary mission and goals beyond those of helping independent inventors. Some of the organizations have broader missions that seek to stimulate human capital and economic development in their region, by helping individuals such as entrepreneurs, small business owners, scientists, and inventors. In some cases, independent inventors encompass a small percentage of the organizations' clientele and membership base.

Sources used to identify IAOs included the United Inventors Association (UIA) (www.uiausa.com), *Inventor Assistance Source Directory* from the U.S. Department of Energy Inventions and Innovation Program, *Inventors Digest* (www.inventorsdigest.com), and general internet searches (www.google.com). Once the research team created a preliminary list of inventor organizations, team members attempted to contact each organization, via phone and e-mail, to explain the purpose of the research and ask for participation. Team members also asked these IAOs to identify similar organizations to include in the research. As a result, the team identified 333 inventor organizations as prospects to be included in the case study review of practices relating to inventor services and programs.

The team conducted 31 case study reviews. Each review included an interview with at least one key point of contact for the IAOs. The interviews were structured with a set of questions to guide the discussion. In an average of 45 minutes, each interview covered the mission of the inventor organization, its general background, the types of products created by its inventors, the types of services and programs provided, the strengths and weaknesses of the services and programs, and the organization's experiences with inventors. In addition, information was collected regarding how the IAOs identify inventors and market their services and programs; whether they partner with other organizations; and suggestions for other organizations seeking to assist independent inventors. A full list of these questions is available in the Appendix.

Confidentiality was assured regarding specific questions that asked the participants to disclose their individual experiences and challenges with clients / inventors. Interview data for those questions has been summarized and reviewed by the interviewees for additional feedback, and incorporated into this report.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Each Inventor Assistance Organization (IAO) chosen for case study review has characteristics that have made it successful to some degree when meeting the diverse needs of inventors.

Diverse organizations were included in this review, ranging from active inventor clubs and non-profit organizations to college- and university-based inventor organizations. A small group of the IAOs functioned as or had extensive access to incubators and business services in the regions they served. Efforts were made to include a sample of organizations from every region of the United States.

Initially, 333 IAOs were identified for further consideration. Several states have more than 10 IAOs, indicating that these states are more resourceful to inventors. California led the pack, followed by Ohio and Michigan. The states with the fewest IAOs (two or less) were Delaware, North Carolina, South Dakota, Georgia, and Maine. There appeared to be comparatively fewer organizations identified in the Midwest region of the U.S.

States with 10 or More IAOs

State	IAOs
California	30
Ohio	19
Michigan	17
Texas	16
Illinois	15
Florida	14
New York	13
Washington	13
Virginia	11

States with 5 or More IAOs

State	IAOs
Oregon	9
Pennsylvania	9
Wisconsin	9
Iowa	8
New Jersey	7
New Mexico	7
Alaska	6
Connecticut	6
Indiana	6
Kansas	6
Minnesota	6
Missouri	6
Alabama	5
Arizona	5
Montana	5

States with 5 or fewer IAOs

State	IAOs
Arkansas	4
Colorado	4
Idaho	4
Kentucky	4
Maryland	4
Massachusetts	4
Nevada	4
North Dakota	4
Oklahoma	4
Tennessee	4
Utah	4
Washington DC	4
Louisiana	3
Mississippi	3
Nebraska	3
New Hampshire	3
Rhode Island	3
South Carolina	3
Vermont	3
West Virginia	3
Wyoming	3
Delaware	2
North Carolina	2
South Dakota	2
Georgia	1
Maine	1

Given that this research was the first comprehensive attempt ever conducted to study inventor assistance organizations, the research team elected to not use screening criteria to further select IAOs for inclusion and opted to keep the investigation as broad in scope as possible. Although efforts were made to include IAOs throughout the United States in the more detailed case study research, the 31 IAOs that ultimately became part of the case study review appeared to largely hail from the eastern half of the country.

The following map displays the geographic locations for the IAOs reviewed by the team. Detailed descriptions of these IAOs are in the “A Closer Look at Promising Practices” section of this report.

Inventor Assistance Organizations - Case Study Participants



A total of 35 representatives participated in the case study interviews. There were some instances when more than one individual was interviewed for a particular organization. Regarding their specific roles at their respective organizations, more than half (56 percent) the participants had an executive title of director (32 percent) or president (24 percent). Fifteen percent of the representatives were the founder of the IAO and had an additional title.

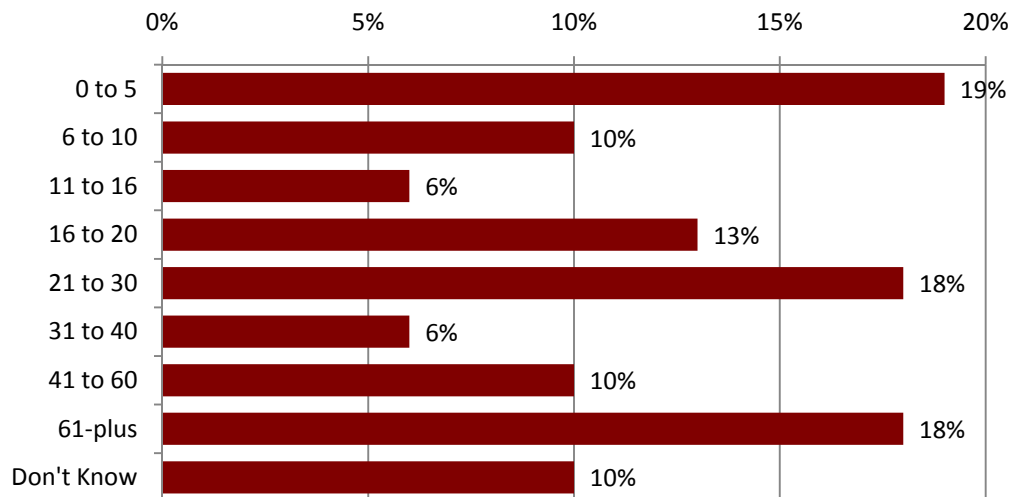
Inventor Organization Participants by Role

Role	Participants (N)	Participants (%)
Director	11	32%
President	8	24%
Founder & Other Role	5	15%
Administrative Assistant	2	6%
Director & Associate Dean	1	3%
Past President	1	3%
Vice Provost	1	3%
CEO	1	3%
Office Administrator	1	3%
Research Analyst	1	3%
Scientist	1	3%
Treasurer	1	3%

Participants were asked to estimate how many independent inventors they serve per month. About 20 percent indicated they serve up to five inventors per month. Ten percent reported serving six to ten inventors per month. Another one-fifth of the IAOs

appear to serve from 11 to 20 inventors per month. However the majority - more than half - of the organizations serve more than 20 inventors per month.

Number of Independent Inventors Served Per Month



Many participants explained that the numbers vary per month because of seasonal cycles that impact their client / membership base. For example, some said that fewer clients are served during the summer months. To some degree, this was also related to the tenure of the program. For example, some IAO representatives with relatively new programs said their goal was to increase the number of inventors helped per month after their program gains momentum.

Two participants indicated that inventors make up a small percentage of their organizations' clientele. For one organization, inventors who are helped are usually those who need help with writing / submitting small-business proposals, and are therefore considered potential entrepreneurs.

SERVICES FOR INVENTORS

One-on-one interviews with representatives from each of the Inventor Assistance Organizations (IAOs) revealed several key trends regarding services for inventors.

The Customer Base

The vast majority (84 percent) of the IAOs have assisted inventors of consumer products. Most of the participants noted that consumer products made up a large proportion the bulk of all products seen by each organization. Medical devices and equipment, agriscience, automotive, and energy and environmental industries were among the other top application areas for inventors served by the IAOs. Of these, all but agriscience were also among the top non-consumer product industry areas reported by inventors participating in the *2007 Survey of Georgia's Independent Inventors*.

Types of Products Seen from Inventors

Types of Products	Number of Organizations	Percentage of Organizations
Consumer Products	26	84%
Medical Devices & Equipment	22	71%
Agriscience	20	65%
Automotive	20	65%
Energy, Environmental	20	65%
Chemical	18	58%
Telecommunications	16	52%
Aerospace	15	48%
Pharmaceuticals & Biotech	15	48%
Multimedia	15	48%
Homeland Security	14	45%
Logistics, Transportation	14	45%
Other Health Care	13	42%
Nanotechnology	12	39%
Business & Financial Services	11	35%
Software	4	13%
Other Types of Products	1	3%
Do Not Know	3	10%

Types of Inventor Services and Programs

The IAOs included in this case study research were asked to disclose the types of services and programs that their organization provides for independent inventors in their service area.

Most of the IAOs hosted weekly or monthly meetings to provide an opportunity for inventors to network, get assistance from experts, and learn about certain topics affecting the invention process. Although some IAOs provided free services, a large number reported to charge annual membership dues, hourly rates for particular services, fees for workshops, and access to or use of certain resources.

IAO Programs and Services

Type of Assistance	Number of IAOs	Percent of IAOs
Referral Services	31	100%
Patent or Trademark Search	22	71%
Marketing and Sales	20	65%
Research	19	61%
Planning or Roadmapping	19	61%
Licensing	17	55%
Advice on Obtaining Financing	17	55%
Technical Evaluation	16	52%
Access to Financial Resources	16	52%
Commercial Evaluation	15	48%
Access to Facilities	15	48%
Patent Application	14	45%
Design	13	42%
Trademark Registration	13	42%
Manufacturing	13	42%
Intellectual Property	12	39%
Scientific / Technical Literature	11	35%
Legal Consultation	11	35%
Prototyping	15	29%
Product or Process Testing	9	29%
Information Technology	8	26%
Human Resources	7	23%
Accounting	7	23%
Management and Technical Assistance	2	6%

Following are more specific highlights based on the discussions with the IAOs.

Third-Party Evaluation

More than half (52 percent) of the IAOs provided technical evaluation for inventor products. IAO representatives discussed how such evaluation was an important step. As pointed out by one representative, “Three out of four inventors try to skip the evaluation stage, and as a result, [they] move to pre-market closure too quickly.” Commercial evaluation was offered by 48 percent of the organizations to help the inventor determine the product’s market feasibility and understanding of the competition in the marketplace reflected by other technologies.

Just over one-third of the organizations provided intellectual property evaluation. Approximately 29 percent of the IAOs offered all three types of third-party evaluation (technical, intellectual property, and commercial evaluation). The research team observed that most of these IAOs were based in universities, which usually have access to more resources, funding, and interdepartmental staff support. Other IAOs were unable to diversify their services because they did not have the same access points as university systems.

Literature Review

More than one-third (35 percent) of the IAOs assisted inventors with scientific and technical literature review. Even though literature /materials were provided, some

IAOs focused on assisting the inventor in conducting the research rather than doing the review for them.

Technical / Scientific Assistance or Advice

More than half (61 percent) of the IAOs assisted inventors with technical or scientific research. Another 42 percent assisted inventors with the actual design of their product. Nearly half (48 percent) provided prototyping assistance, an essential service for helping inventors present their product to potential sources for investing. Less than one-third (29 percent) of the IAOs provided product or process testing services, such as those to validate the product claims the inventor may make.

Intellectual Property Assistance or Advice

The majority (71 percent) of the IAOs provided assistance and advice regarding patent or trademark searches. This service is most frequently offered among the IAOs. Many IAOs shared that conducting patent and trademark searches is the most critical aspect of the invention process. Nearly half (45 percent) also assisted with patent applications. Another 42 percent assisted with trademark registrations. And, just over one-third (35 percent) provided legal consultation to the independent inventor.

Business Assistance or Advice

In the area of business assistance and advice, the most common service offered by the IAOs (65 percent) was in marketing and sales. Second to this, assistance in planning and road mapping was provided by 61 percent of the IAOs. More than half (55 percent) of the IAOs provided assistance and advice in licensing. While some IAOs provided assistance to inventors needing manufacturing, human resources, accounting, and information technology-related help, many of them referred inventors to other organizations (Small Business Development Centers, U.S. Small Business Association, etc.) for such assistance.

Financing

More than half (55 percent) of the IAOs provided advice on obtaining financing or how to access financial resources. Many IAOs discussed the value of some of their members and clients qualifying for grants and other types of funding to help them finance the invention process.

Incubator Services

Although nearly half (48 percent) of the IAOs provided physical incubator space to inventors who were also entrepreneurs, only 6 percent provided management and technical assistance.

Referral Services

Serving independent inventors was largely seen as a “team” effort. Every IAO reported to refer inventors to other organizations to get additional assistance or advice in one or more of the potential areas of needed help. It was frequently shared that the IAOs were selective in determining the types of services and programs they offer to inventors, with no IAO trying to cover every aspect of potential help. The IAOs largely advised that it is important to find a particular niche to maintain focus when helping the independent inventor. Such focus was seen as a way to deliver more effective and

resourceful services to inventors, as opposed to trying to “be all things to all inventors.”

Web Site Content

Seventy-one percent of the IAOs had marketing brochures and/or fact sheets for inventors. A smaller portion (26 percent) reported to not actively market their organizations for various reasons. Some of these organizations did not get involved in marketing because it was too costly; they lack the financial resources to provide services and create marketing materials to appeal to inventors. Others explained that it is more effective and cost-efficient to rely on their Web site to be the primary marketing tool.

Each IAO has an individual web site that has some or all of the following elements:

- **Mission Statement:** General direction of the IAO.
- **Services and Resources:** Description of and links to services and resources accessible to client or members.
- **Events / News:** Announcements and information about speakers and their topics, as well as meetings, networks, forums, workshops, news reports, inventor success stories, and conferences.
- **How to Become a Member or Client:** Information on membership dues, service fees, and contact information, as well as downloadable membership applications, non-disclosure agreements, confidentiality agreements, and other pertinent forms.
- **Membership-Only Access:** Web site pages only accessible through member login user name and password. Sometimes, this includes details on member inventions.
- **Educational Content:** Information regarding frequently asked questions (FAQs) and other inventor resources (local, state, or national), self-help toolkits, comprehensive description of the invention process, fact sheets and newsletters, marketing brochures, information on referral organizations, list of fraudulent companies, ways to avoid inventor scams, and ability to make online purchases of books, relevant subscriber-based publications, etc.
- **Virtual Communications:** Webinars, live chat, blogs, list serves, and other mechanisms to enable members to interact with each other through the Web site.
- **List of Members / Clients and Their Inventions:** List and/or pictures of inventors, volunteers, board of members, and/or their employees.
- **Partnerships / Affiliations and Sponsors:** Information and/or Web links to relevant resource organizations (e.g., United Inventors Association, local chambers of commerce, and government entities) and private sector partnering organizations.

EVALUATING INVENTOR SERVICES

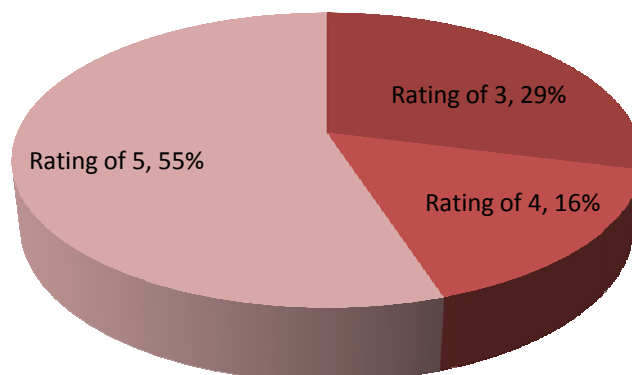
This section highlights findings relating to the accessibility of Inventor Assistance Organization (IAO) services, identified major areas of improvement in IAO services, and evaluation of success by IAO representatives.

Levels of Accessibility

The IAOs were asked to rate their organization's accessibility to independent inventors on a scale of one to five, where "one" meant "not at all accessible" and "five" meant "very accessible." In terms of this self-rating, no IAO provided itself with a rating below 3, meaning all considered themselves to be within the range of averagely accessible to highly accessible. More than half (55 percent) gave themselves the highest rating possible of five, indicating they considered their organizations to be very accessible to the independent inventor. Approximately one-third (29 percent) gave themselves a fairly average rating of three.

How Accessible Is Your IAO to Independent Inventors?

(1 = Not At All Accessible, 5 = Very Accessible)



Those IAOs with a self-rating of three believed there were several elements that could be improved upon to make their inventor organization more accessible. Some IAOs saw their organization as not as responsive to inventors as they could be because they do not engage in real-time conversation with the inventor through, the "plain old telephone system." For example, one IAO representative shared, "We don't have a direct phone number, and there is no one manning the phone line all of the time." Another noted, "We have a pre-paid phone number [with a recording] and we don't have the manpower to deal with *all* calls [or] questions." Other IAOs indicated that their limited staff and resources make it difficult to handle the varying demands of inventors. It was also determined that many inventors need assistance but cannot afford the services offered by the IAO.

Among the IAOs reported to be a *very accessible resource* to inventors, thus providing a rating of five, several pointed to their accessible staff, responsiveness to member and client inquiries and needs, and determination to not to turn anyone away. Some IAOs do not charge a fee to attend open meetings, or they charge a small fee.

Some IAOs believe their organization was accessible because of its geographic location. One interviewee cited the organization's central location in the heart of the city, as aiding its accessibility to the business community. Another IAO had offices throughout the county.

Opportunities for Improvement

The IAOs were asked to identify aspects of their organization or service delivery that need improvement, which would enhance the effectiveness of meeting the needs of the independent inventors they serve. Following is a list of needs they identified, in order of those most frequently mentioned.

1. Expanding staff capacity.

Just over one-fifth (21 percent) of the IAOs indicated that to help inventors they needed greater capacity, that is more volunteers, expanded staff, and stronger participation by members in their respective organizations. One challenge: having too few individuals to support the organization and run it efficiently, which affects their ability to complete their mission, the level of services provided to inventors, and the taxing impact on their employees or volunteers.

2. Improving and expanding products and services.

In terms of the second most frequently mentioned opportunity for improvement, 13 percent of the IAOs mentioned the need to improve or expand their products and services. Some participants described their desire to strengthen the depth of their services in specific areas such as providing business assistance and advice, intensifying the extent they support inventors who need to conduct technical patent research; and tapping into patent and intellectual property lawyers outside the organization.

3. Strengthening communications, marketing and publicity.

Strengthening communications, marketing, and publicity of services tied with two others as the third most frequently mentioned opportunity for IAO improvement. IAOs discussed how they could do a better job at getting the word out to prospective clients / members about what they do and its value. Lack of funding was identified as a major barrier to effective marketing.

3. Expanding inventor reach.

Expanding their reach was as frequently mentioned as strengthening communications, marketing, and publicity as an opportunity for improvement. Approximately 9 percent of the IAOs discussed the need to expand their membership base because they know that many independent inventors are not being helped in their region. Others discussed the need to increase their facility size to accommodate their current clients and members. One IAO representative indicated that having a small facility acts as a barrier: "If we were larger, then we could offer more services and help more inventors."

3. Connecting people (stronger networks and trusting relationships).

Tying with strengthening communications, marketing, and publicity and expanding inventor reach, was the need to do a better job in connecting people and resources.

The need for enabling networking among both inventors and those who serve them was discussed. Reportedly there is a need to build more trusting relationships with inventors who are members or clients of IAOs. It was pointed out by one IAO representative that the ability to create working, trusting relationships with inventors enables the invention process to run smoother.

4. Improving and managing the Web site.

Some IAOs emphasized the importance of managing and improving their individual Web sites. They discussed their Web sites as crucial resources for existing and potential members and clients, and noted how their sites must be constantly updated and improved.

5. Managing, improving, and identifying financial resources.

Although financial resources typically appear to be of prime concern for IAOs, the need to manage, improve, and identify financial resources available to assist inventors was mentioned by only three IAOs, who saw financial resources as enabling them to offer more consistent services and programs for their members and clients. A number of these organizations are funded through public sources and some interviewees noted that if their state budget is financially strained, their organizational capacity tends to become limited. Some participants said that improving their fund-raising capabilities and streamlining the way they manage membership dues will allow them to be more self-sufficient.

5. Broadening and strengthening educational resources and outreach.

Three IAOs discussed the need to broaden and strengthen their educational resources and outreach, beyond what they were currently doing.

5. Protecting inventors from scams.

Some IAOs discussed their concerns regarding the harsh reality of predatory inventor fraud companies, and called for more proactive approaches toward protecting inventors from scams. One participant expressed interest in originating a major campaign to advertise a response to scam companies and to raise inventor awareness.

Inventor Services Needing Improvement

Aspects of Services	Responses (N)	Responses (%)
Expanding staff capacity	12	21%
Improving and expanding products / services	7	13%
Strengthening communications, marketing, publicity	5	9%
Expanding inventor reach	5	9%
Connecting people (strong networks and trusting relationships)	5	9%
Improving and managing Web site	4	7%

Inventor Services Needing Improvement (cont'd)

Aspects of Services	Responses (N)	Responses (%)
Managing, improving, and identifying financial resources	3	5%
Broadening and strengthening educational resources/ outreach	3	5%
Protecting more inventors from scams	3	5%
Narrowing focus on practical, implementable projects to be more effective	2	4%
Getting organized and managing operations	2	4%
Improving responsiveness	2	4%
Improving everything	1	2%
No areas of improvement	1	2%
Do not know	1	2%

Measuring Success

The IAOs were asked how they evaluated the success of their services. Many said they did not have any systems in place to evaluate the success of their organizations' services and/or programs. Some report conducting simple analyses of their organization's performance and presenting such findings annually to their board of directors. In such cases, these analyses often included a review of accounting measures and logistics (e.g., membership dues, number of members).

The IAOs with an evaluation system in place identified the mechanisms to track their success. Among them:

- **Direct monitoring and candid feedback:** A few IAOs review questionnaires / surveys distributed after meetings, expos, etc. They also call or email members and clients to gather their feedback on the aspects they believe were successful and / or need improvement.
- **Statistical process control:** One organization documents the ability of its staff to help its clients in a timely fashion (being able to stay on schedule from start to finish).
- **Outside organization evaluates success:** A small number of IAOs indicated that their organizations' success is evaluated by an outside entity. Some performance measures are evaluated by government entities when they provide funding to the organization.

In terms of the metrics reviewed, following are the more common ones used to determine the level of success.

- **Meeting clients' needs:** Several IAOs document the number of members and clients they serve (including phone calls, walk-ins, etc.), the needs/inquiries they have,

and how each inventor was assisted. If the inventors' needs were met, the organization determines the case was a success.

- **Successfully bring product to market:** Several IAOs follow the success of their members and clients. If the inventors can successfully complete the invention process and bring the product to market, the organization determines its services / programs are successful.
- **Funding:** Some IAOs track the number of grants and Small Business and Innovation Research (SBIR) awards given to their individual members and clients.
- **Membership size:** A few IAOs evaluate their success on the basis of maintaining or increasing their organizations' memberships or client base.
- **Track businesses formed:** One organization records the number of businesses formed by its inventor and entrepreneur clientele. From there, it determines the gross sales, aggregate employment, jobs created, and funding attracted by its clients to determine the success of the business and ultimately measure the success of its own organization in facilitating the client's success.

TOP REQUESTS FOR HELP

When asked to identify the most frequent requests for help from inventors, understanding the patent process and filing a patent received top mention. While this particular need does not correspond with the top needs identified by the *2007 Survey of Georgia's Independent Inventors* largely because it is an area of pre-patent assistance and the survey focused on the needs of inventors who had already received patents some of the other requests for help identified by the IAOs paralleled those identified by Georgia's inventors. Identifying financial resources received second billing in terms of mention by the IAOs. Tying for third was the need to learn about the invention process overall and about licensing or selling an invention. Prototyping assistance was also mentioned by the IAOs to some degree. Accessing product validation and testing services and finding a manufacturer rounded out the top five needs identified. Similarly, the need for help with marketing, manufacturing (including finding a manufacturer partner), evaluation, licensing, business development, and prototyping were all among the top needs identified for Georgia's inventors. In addition, request for help in these areas have been echoed by the calls for assistance received by the research team from dozens of the state's independent inventors in 2007 since the launch of the Innovator Assistance Pilot ProgramSM.

Among the least mentioned types of assistance sought through the IAOs were registering for a trademark, getting design assistance, recovering from a scam, receiving business planning and roadmapping assistance, and attaining advice from a patent attorney perhaps because these areas were aptly covered by other resources outside the IAO.

Top Requests for Help from Inventors

Requests regarding how to...	Responses (N)	Responses (%)
Understand the patent process and file a patent application-intellectual property protection	12	15%
Identify financing sources for invention process (grants, loans, sponsorship)	10	13%
Learn about the invention process	9	11%
License / sell the idea / invention	9	11%
Get prototyping assistance	8	10%
Get product evaluation and test feasibility of idea	5	6%
Find a manufacturer / distributor	5	6%
Understand the commercialization process	4	5%
Get marketing assistance	4	5%
Get market research assistance (market analysis of competition)	3	4%
Identify and use reliable services	3	4%
Attaining advice from patent attorney	2	3%
Receiving business planning and road-mapping advice and assistance	2	3%
Recover from getting scammed; how to get money back or start over	2	3%
Get design assistance (e.g., product sketches, CAD drawings)	1	1%
Register for a trademark(s)	1	1%

GREATEST CHALLENGES

Several challenges were mentioned when the Inventor Assistance Organization (IAO) representatives were asked to share their experiences with serving inventors. Many said that *teaching and explaining the components of the invention process* was the most apparent challenge. IAOs noted that many inventors learn at different paces. They also discussed the need for inventors to be more willing to self-educate on the invention process rather than try to rush through the process to license their products. Some IAO respondents explained that having very few staff and resources can make it difficult to *provide services to inventors who have different personalities and needs*. Inventors were described as largely needing assistance in developing greater salesmanship, interpersonal communication skills, and business acumen, among other things. Just these three things alone are vastly varying skill sets that require different expertise and instruction mechanisms. And, as mentioned above, some inventors learn at different paces, so certain instances may require more time and resources for an IAO representative to teach the invention process in a comprehensible way.

The tendency for *inventors to lack or need financing and funding sources* was also a top challenge mentioned by IAOs. They indicated that a large percentage of inventors conceivably can complete the invention process, but then hit a wall because they lack the financing to move forward. In most cases, many of the IAOs may know about access to funding, but do not supply funding in-house. This tied with the need for product evaluation for third- most-mentioned challenge.

Greatest Challenges in Serving Inventors

Challenges	Responses (N)	Responses (%)
Teaching and explaining the components of invention process	13	18%
Providing services to inventors who have different personalities and needs	11	15%
Assisting with identifying financing / funding sources	9	13%
Providing product evaluation	9	13%
Having enough resources and/or funding	6	8%
Connecting with inventors before scam and helping inventors recover from scam	5	7%
Needing more capacity in terms of volunteers, staff, or expertise	4	6%
Teaching the patent process	4	6%
Getting the word out through mass communication, marketing, publicity	3	4%
Providing business assistance to inventor	2	3%
Determining candidates for program through a selection process	2	3%
Relaying information in an understandable and comprehensive way	1	1%
Providing marketing assistance	1	1%
Getting organized; managing operations	1	1%

LESSONS LEARNED

Regarding the top lessons learned, the largest number of comments provided by representatives from the Inventor Assistance Organizations (IAOs) revolved around how difficult, time-consuming, and resource-intensive it can be to teach inventors the invention process. The need for patience, perseverance, and listening skills was the second most frequently mentioned lesson learned.

IAOs also discussed the challenges with bringing a product to market. They related how inventors are not aware of the difficulties involved with transforming a product into reality. Many respondents described the need for a rigorous research, plus technical and commercial evaluation, which involves a complicated process by the IAOs who offer such services. It is difficult, they said, to assess whether an invention will be successful, and to make such a determination requires a fairly detailed and resource-intensive review.

Some IAOs acknowledged the potential benefits and pitfalls associated with inventors networking at meetings. Exchanging too much information can create a very ambiguous situation regarding intellectual property. For example, as one IAO representative said, “If an inventor discloses the features of the invention and other inventors give advice on how to improve it, then [the question becomes] whose invention is it?” Therefore, while some IAOs promote networking, they may not encourage inventors to share the details of their inventions in networking sessions. Some encourage inventors to discuss what their invention does but not its specific features. Others require all members or clients to complete a nondisclosure agreement to protect the rights of each inventor.

Some IAOs observed that there are no specific characteristics, profession, or vocation determining who can be or will be a successful inventor. Also, there appeared to be some contradictory views concerning whether the level of education pre-determines the success of an inventor. For example, one IAO said that the most successful inventors his organization serves are high school graduates because college graduates will have a greater tendency to give up and “keep their day job” whereas those with less than a college education are more inclined to stick to the invention process. However, another IAO disputed this notion by explaining how inventors with lower education generally have less money than their more educated counterparts and are more vulnerable to scams and, therefore, become less successful than inventors with higher levels of education. Also, economically disadvantaged individuals may be more inclined to depend on their inventions as a way out of an unfavorable economic situation. Whatever the case, there is clearly no “cookbook answer” for what makes an inventor successful.

Partnerships were viewed as sometimes having a positive or negative impact on the success of IAOs. On one hand, it was noted how community involvement can help the IAO run more effectively due to the additional support and resources available. On the other hand, some IAOs said that politics associated with partnerships may complicate the way the IAO is run. For example, IAOs depending on public funding may experience fickle funding support if the current administration changes its priorities.

Then there’s the matter of a selection process to determine if candidates should receive further assistance. Some IAOs advised that filters are needed to determine whether an inventor is a ready candidate for help. This was particularly emphasized when considering limited resources and how to maximize the return on effort (help) provided.

The difference between an inventor and an innovator was another lesson learned according to respondents. These individuals inherently need distinct types of assistance when using IAOs programs and services. For example, an inventor was described as solely involved in the pre-market phase of the invention process where he or she stops after patenting the product. On the other hand, an innovator is someone who successfully brings a product to market and realizes an opportunity to make a profit.

Top Lessons Learned by IAOs

Lessons Learned	Responses (N)	Responses (%)
Teach inventors that the invention process is not easy; it is time-consuming and requires resources	11	23%
As an organization, be patient, persevere, and listen to the inventor	10	21%
Understand that bringing a product to market can be a very difficult process	7	15%
Realize that inventors have diverse needs in terms of research, and in technical and commercial evaluation	5	10%
Consider the potential benefits or pitfalls associated with inventors networking at meetings	3	6%
While screening is important, don't typecast the inventor as there is not a cookbook answer for what makes a successful inventor	3	6%
Understand that partnerships can be effective or counterproductive	2	4%
Create a selection process to determine candidates for program	1	2%
Know the difference between an inventor and innovator	1	2%
Recognize that marketing is costly	1	2%
Understand that universities may not be effective in licensing technology	1	2%

TOP SUGGESTIONS

Every Inventor Assistance Organization (IAO) suggested that *benchmarking other organizations* is the most important action to take when creating a new inventor assistance program. It was also indicated that having *partnerships* is crucial because it enhances the network of resources accessible to both the IAO and inventor. Tying for third in terms of suggestions was the need to use and know the value of *non-disclosure agreements* and having current, credible *materials/resources for inventors*.

Top Suggestions for Assisting Independent Inventors

Suggestions	Responses (N)	Responses (%)
Benchmark other organizations	31	34%
Get involved in internal and external partnerships	8	9%
Use and know the value of non-disclosure agreements	6	7%
Have up-to-date, credible books and materials/resources for inventors	6	7%
Give objective and strict product evaluations	5	5%
Teach the client the invention / patent process; do not do it for them	5	5%
Have well qualified experts on staff	5	5%
Have a selection process in place when deciding which inventors to assist	5	5%
Provide market feasibility studies	3	3%
Have a patent attorney on call or on staff	3	3%
Have patience, and understanding, and listen to the inventor's needs	3	3%
Do not lose track of mission; cannot do it all	3	3%
Provide networking opportunities among inventors	2	2%
Try to be financially self-sufficient	2	2%
Track inventor outcomes (successes or failures)	1	1%
Realize local independent inventors are economic development engines	1	1%
Have a state presence	1	1%
Bet on the inventor and not the product	1	1%

CREATING AN INVENTOR ASSISTANCE ORGANIZATION

After analyzing the case study results, the team identified specific variables, illustrated in a logic model, which are the series of events and conditions contributing to the creation and success of the Inventor Assistance Organizations (IAO). Particularly, the logic model includes four major components:

1. **Inputs:** the conditions leading to the program
2. **Intervention:** the creation of the inventor assistance organization
3. **Outputs:** the responsibilities of an IAO
4. **Barriers:** factors that may negatively impact the success of an IAO
5. **Results:** common outcomes of the IAO

Inputs: Conditions Leading to the Program

Primary Nature

The IAOs indicated that there were certain events or conditions that led to the creation of their organization.

Some determined that there was a *ripe opportunity*, that is, existing resources were available to foster the success of a new organization. These resources included a flourishing business community, which set the foundation for potential strategic partnerships with the inventor organization. Many of the respondents noted that there were several businesses that actively made themselves available to the IAO in several different ways such as providing facilities for meetings or workshops, managing the IAO's Web site, offering sponsorship and support for different events, and/or marketing and referring potential clients and members to the IAO.

Some founders of these programs were motivated by observing of inventors being victimized by inventor fraud companies. They discussed how inventors invest thousands of dollars in false marketing schemes and sometimes lose their property rights for their invention in the process. Some IAO founders created their organizations with the mission of either providing information or educating inventors *about intellectual property and patent protection*; the invention process (bringing product to market); how to get the right type of assistance during the process; and how to detect and avoid inventor scams.

Some respondents said that *geography* played a crucial role in the creation of an inventor organization. There were cases when many inventors within specific regions did not have accessible nearby resources and support. Reportedly, some inventors had to travel over two hours one way or cross state boundaries to get to an IAO. Long travel distances can act as a barrier to inventors who need constant assistance and support. Some founders, therefore, strategically created their IAO in a central navigational location.

In some cases, *newly developed state or local government initiatives* played a role in the program's creation. For example, some of the IAOs discussed their government's mission, which is to foster economic and workforce development activities through a human capital approach, and they recognized that this could be done through the support of entrepreneurship and independent inventor activities within their state or region.

Secondary Nature

There were some who determined that the creation of their IAO was based on the ***outgrowth of exchanged ideas*** between the business community, public sector entities, and inventors meeting at expos, conferences, trade shows, or general meetings focused on inventor activities. These individuals discovered an unmet need and appealing niche for an organization that provides support services and programs to inventors with specific needs.

Instances of inventors not successfully completing the invention process were often tied to their failure to do the appropriate evaluation and research during the preliminary stages of this process. Many IAOs believed there was a ***need for more extensive product evaluation and research*** assistance and advice for inventors. It was observed that many inventors do not realize the rigor involved in the invention process. Some IAO representatives referenced Thomas Edison in saying: “Genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration!”

Also, there were scenarios where inventors are successful in completing the invention process but not interested in licensing their product. Instead, they reportedly wanted to start their own business around their product concept, but could not find the adequate assistance and advice in their particular regions. Some IAOs, then, were formed to provide sufficient services for inventors seeking ***business assistance*** in wrapping a company around their idea or product.

Summary of Conditions Leading to the Program

- Ripe opportunity: existing resources can foster success of new organization
- Intellectual property and patent protection: inventors need idea or invention protected
- Geography: lack of accessible inventor organizations in the region
- Newly developed initiatives: goal to trigger economic or workforce development
- Outgrowth of exchanged ideas: expos, conferences, tradeshow, meetings
- Need for product evaluation or research: determine potential commercial success of product
- Need for business assistance: supportive small business programs and services

Intervention: Creation of the Inventor Assistance Organization

The inputs described in the previous section were active conditions leading to the creation of a program to assist inventors and helped the founders determine its structure and functional niche.

Every IAO is different in terms of scope, scale, and function, but there are some common threads with regards to how each is organized. For example, several IAOs benefitted from an Advisory Committee or a group of individuals responsible for giving advice or recommendations on issues and policies of the inventor organization. Several also had an elected Board of Directors responsible for appointing executive management and for high level oversight. Several organizations also had a designated executive to plan, direct, manage and oversee the operations and support of the rest of the staff.

It is important to highlight the internal and external partnerships involved. Each IAO indicated significant involvement in either internal partnerships which occur when the

IAO is a part of another entity that may or may not share the same mission, but may provide supportive staff and resources or external partnerships that exist through relationships with other public or private organizations or individuals who provide sources of support to the IAO. A wide range of strategic partners and resources were mentioned during the case study interviews. Some of these included:

- Business and industry
- Chamber of Commerce
- Higher Education
- K-12 Education
- Economic Development Councils or Agencies
- Incubators
- *Inventors Digest* Magazine
- Law Firms and Licensing Agents
- Libraries
- Local Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs)
- Miscellaneous Technology-Focused Programs (e.g., Space Alliance Technology Outreach Program)
- National Inventor Fraud Center
- Professional Associations / Societies (e.g., manufacturing, engineering, law etc.)
- Public Entities (national, state, local government agencies, etc.)
- Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)
- State Recycling Board (support for “green” inventions)
- Television Networks and Other Media
- United Inventors Association (UIA)
- U.S. Patent & Trademark Office (USPTO) and Patent & Trademark Depository Library (PTDL)
- Venture Capitalists
- Wal-Mart and Other Retailers
- Other inventor organizations in the region or across the nation

Defining Functional Niche

Most of the IAOs defined their functional niche by creating specialized programs. There seemed to be some consensus among those included in the case study that focusing on a select, rather than broad, array of programs and services, building upon the strengths of available expertise and resources, enables an organization to specialize in its strengths and be more effective.

Outputs

The IAOs included in the case study identified several outputs related to their efforts.

Partnerships with Other Organizations

Collaborating with other organizations was reported to enhance the network of resources available to the IAO and its membership and client base. IAOs involved in partnerships tended to refer duties outside the organization. One respondent noted that his private-sector partner hosts the IAO Web site and actively refers prospective clients to the IAO. Several representatives indicated that some of their partners provide the facilities for IAO monthly meetings free of charge.

Education and Networking Opportunities

Many IAOs find it important to provide opportunities for inventors to learn about the various factors involved in the invention process, the resources they need access to, and how to bring their product to market. Some IAOs incorporated these educational elements within monthly meeting agendas and also encouraged the inventors to network with their peers.

Accessible and Reliable Resources, Services, and Experts

Several of the IAOs indicated that it is critical for the IAO to have accessible and reliable resources, services, and experts. They emphasized how demanding inventors' varying needs and expectations can be when they are seeking help from IAOs. IAOs discussed the need for solid preparation to assist inventors and active partnerships with other organizations providing the services unavailable at the IAO.

Branding and Credibility

Most of the IAO representatives said that having a credible presence in the community is important for establishing trust with their existing and potential membership / client base. Many inventors have been targeted by scam companies and fraudulent individuals who plan to steal their ideas. Not only does the IAO have to actively market its programs and services in the community, it is equally important for the IAO to push positive brand recognition—a reliable source that inventors can trust.

In addition, a vast majority of IAOs revealed how they do not need to identify independent inventors within their service areas. These IAOs' credible reputations travel to the client base via word of mouth, as well as by referrals from other organizations and through existing and past members and clients. Therefore, IAOs that build strong brands within their respective service areas will *not* need to expend as much effort in marketing campaigns to identify independent inventors.

Barriers

Several barriers were identified as common threads among the IAOs included in the case study. Such factors could possibly impede the success of an IAO and the clients they serve.

Insufficient Resources and Capacity

IAOs representatives also explained how the success of their organization was inhibited by their inability to meet all of their clients and members' diverse needs. They observed that insufficient staff, poor management, and inadequate operations were common obstacles. Many IAOs are reported to need more staff support but unable to secure the necessary resources. The leadership of several IAOs was reported to consist of volunteers or part-time workers because the IAOs cannot afford full-time personnel. A representative explained how taxing it can be on IAOs that depend on volunteers due to the fact that they typically have full-time job or other obligations. In some instances, this directly impacts the management and operations of the IAOs, and has affected the success of some organizations.

In most cases, IAOs also appeared to lack access to diverse resources, or they assumed responsibilities beyond their capacity or level of support for various reasons. IAOs that have inefficient resources and/or funding find it difficult to successfully run their organization.

Weak Brand, Communication, Marketing Campaign

Many IAO officials pointed to weak marketing campaigns as creating noticeable barriers to the success of their IAO. Some expressed a desire to strengthen their brand by communicating and establishing more relationships with other organizations in the community. Others anticipated that their membership and client base could increase with the re-inventing of their marketing strategies.

Inadequate Selection Process: to Determine Membership or Client Base

Several IAO representatives pointed to the need to incorporate a screening process. As inventors have very diverse needs, it is important to be selective in determining who to help and how to help them. The lack of having a definable list of criteria to determine the level of service was identified by many as problematic and resulting in the IAO spending time in areas deemed less productive or valuable than others.

Results

A review of the experiences of the 31 IAOs included in this case study reveals several common experiences.

- A strong and diverse Advisory Board was mentioned as a necessity for an IAO. It expands the breadth of resources available to the IAO and independent inventor. The board members who work or represent organizations outside the IAO will present opportunities for the maintenance of partnerships throughout the community.
- IAOs placed a large value on the use of volunteers in their staffing structure; their presence limits the overhead costs of doing business. At the same time, IAOs that have limited paid staff capacity can find running a volunteer-based organization to have challenges in terms of meeting client needs on limited resources.
- The time for an inventor to successfully get their product to market varies and can be extensive. There was a general consensus that it can take anywhere from three weeks to ten years for the inventor to bring their product to market. It can be extremely difficult for an IAO to track inventors who may have used the IAO services years before their product is commercialized.
- There is huge potential for the costs to exceed the profits of an IAO in the short run, because most inventors do not commercialize their products within a short time span. Therefore, it is highly unrealistic for IAO products and services to guarantee short-term results in terms of inventors licensing and /or commercializing their products, creating small businesses, etc.
- Governments at the federal, state and municipal levels usually fund endeavors that can promise tangible results, such as job growth, creation of businesses and successful licensing of products. Success story documentation is imperative.
- While many of the IAOs have documentation regarding inventors attaining patents and taking product to market, the economic return of such efforts is unknown. The majority noted the inherent difficulty in documenting and tracking the successful inventor. In most cases, the successful inventor does not maintain contact with the IAO after using the resources provided.

Reportedly, there have been no studies that have measured IAO outcomes or investigated the local economic impact of the independent inventor served through the IAOs.

- Most of these IAOs explain that having a center with resources for independent inventors will benefit the local economy. However, the results appear to only be visible when measuring the long term goals, as opposed to comparing the year-to-year costs of the program against short term, immediate results.

A CLOSER LOOK AT PROMISING PRACTICES

Each Inventor Assistance Organization (IAO) shared insights with the Georgia Tech team for consideration in how best to support independent inventors in Georgia. Several appeared to be able to successfully overcome the obstacles that may emerge while running a program to assist the independent inventor and have some results to show. The IAOs had unique recipes for success; however, there were particular IAOs that had models that would best fit the existing and *potential* structure of resources and support for Georgia Tech's Innovator Assistance Pilot Program (IAPP). Following are some common threads the team saw among the more successful IAOs:

- Focusing on niche services and areas of specialization
- Providing accessible and reliable resources, services, and experts to meet the diverse needs of inventors
- Having a strong brand or credible presence in the service area
- Relying on resource partners, referral channels and word of mouth for client identification as opposed to active marketing of services
- Creating partnerships with other organizations
- Investing resources to ensure the longevity and sustainability of the program and mission

Following are capsule looks at each IAO included in this research.

Alabama Inventors Club

Lexington, Alabama

Web site: N/A

Mission: To educate and empower the inventor.

Founded: 2004

How was it started? About four years ago, the organization started with one member, with the hopes to grow and be a crucial resource for inventors in Alabama. Now, the Alabama Inventors Club has 50 to 60 active members and 300+ plus general members.

Leadership structure: The organization has board of directors (with a maximum capacity of four to five members).

How is it funded? Although the Alabama Inventors Club engages in fundraisers, Snowmaster's, a company owned by the director of the organization, sponsors and primarily funds the club.

How does it operate? The club hosts Inventor Fairs in Lexington, Alabama.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Due to the club's reliability, it has positive brand recognition in the community, which reduces the need to actively find inventors because inventors typically approach the club through referrals and word-of-mouth. However, members also market the club's services and attend trade shows. In addition, the club is regularly featured in the local newspaper

and other local and national media outlets. For example, the club's director was recognized in *Time Magazine* as the "Inventor of the Year" in 2005.

Strengths according to IAO: The philosophy to make inventors believe that anything is possible.

Aztech, Inc.

Buffalo, New York

Web site: www.wnyilp.org/aztech

Mission: To improve the quality of life for people with medical conditions, disabilities, and the elderly, Aztech helps companies and independent inventors eliminate guesswork from the process of bringing new products and services to market.

Founded: 1979

How was it started? Aztech originated from a grant-supported partnership between the Center for Assistive Technology at the University of Buffalo (CAT/UB), the Western New York Technology Development Center, and the Western New York Independent Living Project (WNYILP). This partnership was funded through a grant from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), a division of the U.S. Department of Education.

Leadership structure: The organization has four staff members and reports to the Western New York Independent Living Project.

How is it funded? The organization is funded through fee-for-service per client and the Western New York Independent Living Project.

How does it operate? Aztech hosts a focus group of five to six individuals who evaluate pricing and critique prototypes. The organization created and continues to update a consumer database including a few thousand individuals with disabilities, which helps the staff organize effective focus groups. The organization strives to provide cost-effective marketing services customized for the client's specific needs.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Aztech's reputation is well-known in the area and, therefore, very little effort goes toward identifying independent inventors. Inventors usually find the organization through referrals and word-of-mouth. Organization representatives also attend trade shows and conferences and provide presentations at conferences.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization focuses on providing one-on-one consumer evaluation to inventors, including those with disabilities.

Braintree (Mansfield/Richmond Incubator)

Mansfield, Ohio

Web site: www.braintreepartners.org/

Mission: To help entrepreneurs succeed.

Founded: Late 1980s

How was it started? Braintree began through a community effort when businesses and economic development professionals identified a need for an incubator facility. They conducted research to build a case to qualify for funding to finance the construction and operation of the incubator facility.

Leadership structure: The organization has a board of directors with staff support by CEO, Director of Operations and Director of Business Assistance.

How is it funded? Braintree is a funded facility, in part by Ohio's Department of Development Technology Division, the city of Mansfield, Richland County, North Central State College (in-kind), and some private businesses. Funding also comes from tenant leases and revenue producing programs.

How does it operate? Experienced "Braintree Partners" offer counseling, customer referral, access to capital, and training opportunities. Braintree Partners have established personal relationships within the community (businesses, government agencies, etc.) and consistently attend luncheons, interact with and serve on various committees to network, help entrepreneurs transform their ideas into successful enterprises, and focus on helping inventors who wish to commercialize technology, particularly in the areas of clean energy, advanced manufacturing, biosciences, and information technologies.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Mansfield is a small market: the city's population is approximately 55,000; the county's population is 125,000; and the region's population is estimated at 500,000. Due to the size of the market and the awareness that the organization exists, inventors are often referred.

Strengths According to IAO: Clients of Braintree gain access to resources, businesses and the economic development community in the service area and beyond.

Center for Economic Development at Jacksonville State University JSU Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Jacksonville, Alabama

Website: <http://www.jsu.edu/depart/sbdc/>

Mission: To promote economic development in Jacksonville, Alabama by providing assistance to small businesses and independent inventors (who make up approximately 2 percent of the client base).

Founded: 1980

How was it started? It was started with the goal of supporting different types (e.g., small-business growth, entrepreneurship) of economic development within the region.

Leadership structure: Organization has staff comprising a director, associate director, account executive and secretary.

How is it funded? The organization is funded through the U.S. Small Business Administration and state funding.

How does it operate? It focuses on areas of assistance that include business start-up considerations, licensing information, business structure, recordkeeping, taxes, insurance considerations, business plan formation and review, projection of cash flow

and other financial statements, and government procurement services. The JSU SBDC encourages inventor networking and encourage inventors who have filed patents to exchange ideas. Inventors who do not hold patents are not advised to expose their ideas, and the organization encourages inventors to sign non-disclosure statements during these network meetings.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? JSU SBDC does not identify independent inventors because most come to the organization after learning about it through the Web site, inventor conferences (held every other year), referrals, and word-of-mouth.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization works to set inventors in the right direction to protect themselves and their ideas. It helps determine whether the inventor needs to continue the invention process through its business assistance services.

Central Kentucky Inventors Council (CKIC)

Lexington, Kentucky

Web site: www.ckic.org/

Mission: To educate, innovate, and motivate by bringing inventors together to network with other inventors, entrepreneurs, and other creative people.

Founded: 1996

How was it started? After retiring from IBM, one of the founders teamed up with a friend to get some of their inventions patented. At the time, they found that Ohio was the nearest state that could provide help for inventors. They determined that Kentucky needed an inventor organization, which gave them the incentive to start one.

Leadership structure: The organization is incorporated with a board of directors and the following officers: president, vice president, director secretary, and treasurer. All of these officers are volunteers.

How is it funded? CKIC is a non-profit organization with a \$40 annual membership fee. There are no facility costs because a company allows the meetings to take place in its conference room after hours and free of charge. CKIC does not accept money or contracts.

How does it operate? CKIC teaches inventors how to find resources for tracking technology and job shops, among other things, through different research techniques. CKIC provides information to help inventors resolve their inquiries and keep them connected with resources. Workshops are confidential—only members can attend. However, the organization does host monthly meetings that are free and open to the public. Guest speakers have expertise in different areas (e.g., The Entrepreneurs Council, Better Business Bureau, and marketing professionals).

How are independent inventors needing help identified? CKIC does not expend much effort in identifying independent inventors in the region. Individuals learn about CKIC's reputation by browsing the web site, via referrals from small businesses, and from other organizations in the region.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization offers technical and prototyping advice to determine whether an invention will work. CKIC also has expertise on the

complexity of the invention process, and it works to address inventors' needs through education.

Edison Inventors Association, Inc. (EIA)

Fort Myers, Florida

Web site: www.edisoninventors.org/

Mission: To reinvigorate and advance the inventive and entrepreneurial spirit of Thomas Alva Edison.

Founded: 1992

How was it started? Two founders (one founder was the inventor of the 8-track tape) played a significant role in the local community. They planned the local community's first inventor conference showcase at which they were able to pull keynote speakers to conference, approximately 40 exhibitors, and an audience of approximately 150 people. Names were taken of individuals who were interested in starting an inventors association.

Leadership structure: The organization has officers including president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary as well as a board of directors. There are no paid positions.

How is it funded? EIA is a non-profit organization that does not have a regular source of outside funding. Funds are mainly generated through membership fees: individual membership (annual renewal of \$25 and new membership of \$35) and family membership (annual renewal of \$35 and new membership of \$55).

How does it operate? EIA encourages networking and the sharing of experiences and knowledge among inventors. The organization works to create an educational environment in which its members can "share the journey." EIA is a major contributor to the Thomas A. Edison Regional Science and Inventors Fairs. Such events promote all areas of interest in invention to over 20,000 students annually, with 800 finalists judged by more than 200 volunteer judges from all walks of life.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? The organization's strong brand name in the community results in it not having to scout for new members; instead, potential members reportedly find EIA.

Strengths according to IAO: EIA creates an atmosphere of friendship and security where inventors can discuss their needs. In addition, EIA is an educational non-profit that gives grants to inventors who are interested in business planning.

Infotonics Technology Center

Canandaigua, New York

Web site: www.infotonics.org/

Mission: To drive economic growth and create high-technology businesses from its position as a world leader in photonics and microsystems innovation and commercialization.

Founded: 2000

How was it started? Eastman Kodak, Xerox Corp., and Corning Inc. started the center. During the telecom boom, the New York Governor wanted to use federal money to capitalize on the photonics industry to create a “Center of Excellence” in close proximity to Rochester, New York. Rochester is renowned for its specialization in photonics and optics.

Leadership structure: The organization has a board of directors and full-time staff.

How is it funded? The center is a \$130 million “Center of Excellence” designated by the State of New York. It runs like a full-service consulting firm. Clients are charged per hour for each project. Typically, the center receives \$100,000 to \$200,000 per project. The center uses government funding to sustain operations; however, the goal is to be self-sufficient by 2009. Infotonics engages in joint proposals with inventors for funding by outside sources such as the Veteran’s Administration, SBIR / STTR, Homeland Security, and U.S. Department of Defense.

How does it operate? The center is a collaborative operation by Corning, Kodak, the Rochester Regional Photonics Cluster, Xerox, New York State, the federal government, and 18 colleges and universities. It partnerships with these entities enable it to link inventors to public and private research and technical resources throughout its region. On the federal government level, the organization partners with Army research labs, Empire State Development Corporation, NASA, the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. Small Business Administration. Infotonics provides assistance in concept development, microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) prototyping, one stop fabrication and custom packaging, pilot production, low volume manufacturing, and business development.

How are independent inventors needing help are identified? The center stays connected with universities in the region, markets at trade shows, and through advertisements in trade magazines.

Strengths According to IAO: MEMS lab is considered the best in the country.

Innovation Institute (I²) and World Innovation Network (WIN) at Missouri State University

Web site: www.wini2.com/

Mission: To provide inventors with an explanation for their possible success of invention and/or to identify potential failures or solutions to the problems of product.

Founded: 1979

How was it started? In 1973, a program was started as a National Science Foundation (NSF) innovation experiment and eventually moved to the private sector as a follow-on activity. The program was one of a small group of NSF-funded experimental centers to focus on serving independent inventors that ran for about seven years. The centers tested different incentives for stimulating technological innovation. The program initially received \$790,000 in 1973. With professional experience from General Electric, Gerald Udell was hired as the director. Udell created a selection process for determining commercial feasibility of inventions and eventually attracted sponsorship by Wal-Mart. This gave birth to the Wal-Mart Innovation Network. Wal-Mart eventually stopped providing funding and, as a result, the center broke away from the university and the Innovation Institute (I²) started in 1979 as a for-profit venture. Missouri State

University was given the property rights in 1986. I² redefined the WIN acronym to World Innovation Network.

Leadership structure: Organization has Director but no full-time employees.

How is it funded? Services are fee-based at \$200 per evaluation.

How does it operate? The organization provides evaluations through a network of evaluators (employed elsewhere) that are brought in to do evaluations based on their area of expertise. All evaluations are done by professionals trained in various fields (e.g., for medical devices, a doctor evaluates the product). Every evaluator must pass a probation period and go through training. Some university employees conduct product evaluations. The goal is to provide an evaluation that enables less time and money spent on products that are not going to add to the bottom line—jobs for people. The founder strives to continually improve the product evaluation process and invented an evaluation tool. The organization has copyrighted the 12th version of the Preliminary Innovation Evaluation Service (PIES 12). I² serves inventors all over the country, as well as a fair number from Canada, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, China, and India.

How are independent inventors needing help are identified? I² has no proactive marketing campaign. Inventors discover the center through some advertising, the web site, word-of-mouth, or referrals from inventors groups, universities, companies, and former clients (e.g., Wal-Mart refers inventors to the center).

Strengths according to IAO: I² originated the product evaluation process (PIES tool) to be understood by inventors. The institute focuses on evaluation only. The staff has years of experience in understanding the innovation process.

InventOne

Gainesville, Florida and Sandpoint, Idaho

Website: www.inventone.com/

Mission: To work with inventors to bring products to market.

Founded: 1992

How was it started? The founder worked with government in the commercialization process and decided to start company.

Leadership structure: Organization has a board of directors.

How is it funded? InventOne runs like a small consulting firm and charges \$275 for evaluation services and \$175 per hour for consultation services. InventOne is a private company and takes a percentage of the invention. There are no membership dues.

How does it operate? Consultants (founder and board members who have specific expertise to help complete the product evaluation) will sit down with an inventor to evaluate or test feasibility of the product by using the PIES tool. After the product evaluation is completed, the inventor may be provided consultation to negotiate licensing deals, etc. Consultants will determine whether manufacturing is cost-effective to go to market. Also, InventOne encourages networking between innovators and entrepreneurs.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? InventOne does not try to identify independent inventors. Inventors are referred to the company by patent attorneys, major retailers, and international clientele (e.g., United States, Sudan, Japan, South Africa), etc.

Strengths according to IAO: InventOne's philosophy is valuing honesty and reality together. InventOne also has access to resources and several prominent inventor contacts across industries throughout the country.

Inventors Alliance

Silicon Valley, California

Web site: www.inventorsalliance.org/

Mission: To educate inventors on how they can bring their products to market.

Founded: 1993

How was it started? After attending an exhibit at an innovation fair hosted by a state university, the founder thought it would be beneficial for the region to create an inventors association. It started with 12 members and now the membership has grown to approximately 2,500.

Leadership structure: The organization has a board of directors comprising volunteers. (Inventors are not included in the board of directors.)

How is it funded? The organization is funded through a \$60 annual membership fee or \$15 to \$30 per meeting for non-members.

How does it operate? Inventors Alliance teaches one seminar per week where successful inventors, patent attorneys, manufacturers, etc. tell how they did it. "The organization teaches members about all aspects of the invention process: marketing, manufacturing, venturing (starting your own company), licensing (selling your ideas for a royalty), prototyping, and sales and patenting. It hosts webinars for members located across the country.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? The organization has brand recognition and the Web site has a high search engine rating as inventors browse its content. Therefore, little effort is geared toward identifying independent inventors.

Strengths according to IAO: The speakers are the Inventors Alliance stronghold because they give advice to members and tell them how they became successful.

Inventors Alliance of Northern California (IANC)

Palo Cedro, California

Web site: www.inventorsnorcal.org/

Mission: To improve the economy by educating independent inventors on how to become self-sufficient through conducting their own research, marketing, and product testing, and by understanding factors in invention protection, selecting manufacturers, and licensing.

Founded: 2001

How was it started? The founder was an economic development professional who believed entrepreneurship and innovation could be realized through supporting the needs of the independent inventor. The founder created the Inventors Alliance in hopes of motivating people to invent and patent products.

Leadership structure: The organization has a four-member board of directors consisting of inventors and volunteers.

How is it funded? This is a not-for-profit organization that is funded through corporate sponsorship (grants and donations). There is also a membership fee of \$20 per year.

How does it operate? IANC creates awareness about government grants supporting “green” inventions. It is an educational organization that holds meetings, classes, and workshops to help bring the latest information to the public about conception, protection, and commercializing inventions or ideas. IANC teaches inventors about the importance of recycling and using recyclable goods. It hosts the Junior Invention Convention, which is an outreach program that involves regional schools (sixth to eighth grades). The first, second, and third place winners win a scholarship from the IANC investment fund. The convention teaches the entrepreneurship model in schools and reinforces the value of math and literacy, which are needed to successfully engineer products and enhance one’s ability to sell products. The organization donates four to five books a year to area schools (e.g., books that highlight women inventors).

How are independent inventors needing help identified?: IANC advertises through the Internet, passes out flyers, maintains email lists to send out event notifications, and stays connected with other non-profits and companies with similar missions.

Strengths according to IAO: Education. IANC focuses on teaching and empowering inventors to learn the practical skills that will allow them to write claims and file patent applications without the organization assisting them every step of the way.

Inventors Assistance League, Inc. (IAL)

Los Angeles, California

Web site: www.inventions.org/

Mission: To have everyone in the world put creative ideas in the marketplace.

Founded: 1962

How was it started? The founder was a patent practitioner who wanted to test his ideas in the marketplace before he applied for a patent. He recognized that corporate America follows this model and wanted individual inventors to do this while protecting their ideas and/or patents.

Leadership structure: Organization has a board of directors and the following officers: CEO, marketing director, treasurer, and secretary. There are four patent attorneys available on an as-needed basis. IAL also has paid staff and volunteers.

How is it funded? IAL is a non-profit (501 (c) that gets approximately 75 percent of its funding through the \$395 tuition charge for its program (video and elaborate information booklets). An estimated 25 percent of funds are from private donation.

How does it operate? Members have unlimited access to patent attorneys and staff in the IAL office. Many members are located around the world, so they call in and get consultation. The majority (99.9 percent) of the questions they ask are answered by the program that is mailed to them. IAL also teaches marketing and sales. To help inventors introduce their idea in the marketplace, IAL provides several company profiles and develops one-page flyers for members that explain what the invention is (*not* “how” it works) and sends it to manufacturers. This usually results in the company soliciting the inventor rather than the inventor soliciting the company. The process helps individuals protect their ideas.

IAL encourages inventors to write in a journal (provided by IAL) so they can document their ideas and note where they make presentations to companies. IAL suggests that the prospective company record such meetings in the journal as well – this helps protect the individual in the pre-patent stage. The league also hosts seminars in public libraries, where networking is promoted; however, inventors are not encouraged to discuss their inventions. On a voluntary basis, IAL representatives also go to small-claims court with some inventors who have been scammed.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Inventors discover the organization through its Web site and via recommendations from previous members or other organizations.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization’s experience acquired over the years has resulted in knowledge of the organization’s staff that benefits the inventor.

Inventor Association of Georgia (IAG)

Norcross, Georgia

Web site: www.georgiainventors.com/index.php

Mission: To help the state economy.

Founded: Established in 1968 and incorporated in Georgia in 1976.

How was it started? IAG was started by area inventors, with the assistance of Georgia Tech and area businesses, who organized an inventor expo in the late 1960s. Attendees from that expo began meeting to share common concerns and address obstacles common to every inventor.

Leadership structure: Organization operates under Hocken’s rules for procedure: a board of directors and officers run IAG by proxy. Every member is essentially a proxy as long as he/she pays the dues and believes in the mission.

How is it funded? IAG is a not-for-profit organization with membership dues of \$25 annually from 450 members. It also receives contributions from members and from the Academy of Science.

How does it operate? IAG is a mixed group of experienced patent owners, inexperienced inventors, patent practitioners, marketing consultants, and other innovative persons who like to get together, share accomplishments and concerns, help promote invention and innovation, and provide guidance to members without breaching implied confidentiality. IAG holds monthly meetings where seasoned inventors, entrepreneurs, patent agents, and others teach a range of topics (e.g., marketing, intellectual property, licensing, building prototypes). IAG keeps members informed of changes in patent laws and regulations and describes the general process and

procedures of patent, trademark, and copyright applications, and the marketing of an invention. IAG provides training modules and works with K-12 schools during “inventors’ month” to encourage students to value the invention process.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Numerous organizations refer prospective members to IAG (e.g., contacts at the Patent & Trademark Library at Georgia Tech, the University of Georgia, SCORE). IAG also receives many inquiries through its Web site, and some Web visitors attend a meeting as a result.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization seeks to pull inventors’ ideas into the mainstream (marketplace) of daily life through educational tools, which are constantly updated, and through efforts to reduce administrative burdens for inventors.

Inventors Association of Saint Louis

Saint Louis, Missouri

Web site: www.inventorsconnection.org

Mission: To help inventors go from concept to marketability of invention, and to provide resources to help inventors get the appropriate information needed to succeed.

Founded: 1983

How was it started? The founders (inventors, entrepreneurs, and patent attorneys) were inventors who determined that there were several clubs focused on various interest areas, but none was designed to help and support inventors and entrepreneurs.

Leadership structure: Organization consists of a president, board of directors, two patent attorneys (who are available as needed), and a certified public accountant who [does the treasury work] handles finances.

How is it funded? The organization is funded through membership dues (new membership is \$55 and renewal is \$35). Donations at meetings average \$5 per person.

How does it operate? Monthly lectures every third Thursday at 9 PM. Outreach goes to individuals on an average of a 35-mile radius. (The founder of the United Inventors Association, Roberta Toole, was working at this organization when she decided that there was a need to start a national umbrella organization for inventors.)

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Reputation and word-of-mouth (e.g., patent attorneys, the Patent Depository Library) attract inventors to the organization. Inventors are also able to learn about the organization through the phone book, magazines, the Web site, and Internet search engines.

Strengths according to IAO: The association makes information understandable, not technical. The Web site is informative because it has links to various resources, organizations, patent information, inventor organizations, details about the invention process (“how-to”), and articles written by experts.

Inventors' Council of Cincinnati

Cincinnati, Ohio

Web site: www.inventcinci.org/

Mission: To support independent inventors and teach them different ways to get their products to market.

Founded: Late 1960s or early 1970s

How was it started? The council was formally under the Salmon Club and then the Dayton Council before it became independent in 2001.

Leadership structure: Organization has a board of directors (15- member limit) and volunteers.

How is it funded? The council is a non-profit organization with annual membership dues of \$60 for new members and \$50 for renewed memberships. It partners with a law firm to secure funding, donations and grants. (At the time of this case study, the organization reportedly was considering the hiring of a part-time staff member to focus on identifying funding sources.)

How does it operate? Free monthly meetings are held at the Public Library of Cincinnati, which is the state's Patent & Trademark Depository Library. The meetings are structured as a combination of networking and education. Guest speakers present on different topics (e.g., patent process, online retailing). The council has two big events a year- one seminar, and an "inventors fair" with the United Inventors Association. The council is heavily involved in the library's Inventors' Fest.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Inventors discover the organization through the Web site, referrals from law firms, venture associations, and active members who tell their friends.

Strengths according to IAO: The board of directors is diverse, talented, and committed. Members originate creative ideas and value the importance of relationships and partnerships in the area and are known to provide assistance to inventors.

Inventor's Network of the Carolinas (INotC)

Charlotte, North Carolina

Web site: www.inotc.org

Mission: To empower inventors through education, support, and networking opportunities.

Founded: 2005

How was it started? The founders were inventors who came very close to getting scammed and recognized that several other inventors shared their plight. As a result, they sought assistance from an Inventor's Council in Greensboro, North Carolina, which was two hours away. The founders decided to start their own Inventors Council in Charlotte. A steering committee was formed after the founders met with the local Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and networked with area business people.

Leadership structure: The organization has a board of directors, steering committee, president, vice president, intellectual property attorney, and funding expert.

How is it funded? INotC is a non-profit organization. When founded, three sponsors helped to fund the operations. Members pay annual dues of \$75. (Members have the option to pay \$20 per month until the total membership dues amount is paid in full.)

How does it operate? Enventys is the major sponsor that provides marketing resources and speakers. This company also hosts the Web site and helps create connections in the community between the Inventor's Network, other organizations, and inventors throughout the community. Enventys is also the creator of the half-hour Inventor Contest series on the local public broadcasting station (PBS). The founders of the Inventor's Network of the Carolinas are judges on the PBS show. There are monthly meetings with a variety of speakers who may be successful, working inventors, patent attorneys, etc., and these meetings provide some open sessions for networking.

How are independent inventors needing help are identified? INotC has a presence on the United Inventors Association Web site, *Inventor's Digest* and its own Web site. Associates at Enventys and other organizations refer inventors to the organization.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization educates inventors about the different ways inventors can bring their product to the market and get funding. INotC meeting attendees gain knowledge from other inventors who have succeeded, and who have failed. INotC assists inventors who need to create business plans and determine their idea's feasibility.

Inventors Society of Southern Florida (ISSF)

Delray Beach, Florida

Web site: www.inventorssociety.net

Mission: To guide inventors and try to help and encourage them if they are willing to learn.

Founded: 1981 or 1982

How was it started? Founders were a married couple. The husband had a patent that was used in the military when he served his term. They created an organization where inventors could benefit from an accessible resource for support and guidance through the invention process.

Leadership structure: Organization has a board of directors consisting of eight members. Officers include president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.

How is it funded? ISSF is a non-profit organization. The main funding source is through membership dues (\$60 per year). It receives some donations on occasion.

How does it operate? ISSF holds monthly meetings with speakers (e.g., patent attorneys and agents), hosts an annual exhibition, and organizes programs planned for "Inventors Day" in the summer. ISSF staff also visit schools and judge students' inventions.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? The organization has brand recognition, so independent inventors come to the organization through referrals.

Strengths according to IAO: ISSF has more than 30 years of history and experience. The organization is still strong even though it runs on very little funding.

Inventors Society of Southern Nevada

Las Vegas, Nevada

Website: N/A

Mission: To educate to prevent fraud and help inventors find resources to get their products to market.

Founded: 1998 or 1999

How was it started? The founder began the Inventors Society motivated by several inventors who were trying to recover from scams. The founder investigated the factors that led to these scams and saved some individuals from scams. She decided that inventors needed to be educated and needed someone who could investigate fraud and to give advice about how to avoid being scammed.

Leadership structure: Organization is led by the founder.

How is it funded? The founder funds the society. The annual membership dues are \$45.00.

How does it operate? The society is an education-only group. The founder travels internationally to speak to other IAOs. The international audience consists of individuals who live in England and Australia there is a very small inventor membership in Las Vegas where the society is headquartered. The society has volunteers or ambassadors, in practically every nation of the European Union. As a result, the founder set up small volunteer satellites to help with the mission.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? The Inventors Society does not advertise. Inventors are from all around the world and find the information about the organization through the Internet.

Strengths According to IAO: The organization provides one-on-one services.

Iowa State University, Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Ames, Iowa

Web site: www.bus.iastate.edu/Outreach/sbdc.asp

Mission: To assist inventors with testing the feasibility of their ideas before moving on in the invention process. (Goal is to prevent the inventors from getting tangled up with patents and spending their money on things that *may* not be commercially feasible.)

Founded: 1982

How was it started? The founders were a professor and an inventor who were particularly interested in inventor trade shows. They started a youth inventors program in the state through the local SBDC. (SBDCs were created through an act of Congress in 1977.) The founders wanted to create an IAO that focused on the local population as they realized many inventors in the state needed assistance with recovering from being victims of fraud or wanted general help with the invention process.

Leadership structure: Organization has a panel to consult with inventors. The SBDC is connected with the university leadership structure and the U.S. Small Business Administration.

How is it funded? U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) funds the SBDC. The organization charges \$125 to conduct a feasibility study for inventors.

How does it operate? The SBDC uses a software program, which analyzes the feasibility of an inventor's product idea. The program requires that the inventor answer a series of questions. Through a specific methodology (33 indicators), the panel reviews the answers to each question and rates them on a scale of 1 to 100. This scale is used to measure a product's feasibility and determines whether the inventor goes on to the next level. If an individual proceeds with the idea, SBDC representatives and local patent attorneys provide business assistance to that inventor.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Due to the SBDC's national coverage over the decades, its brand name eliminates the need to market to independent inventors. Inventors contact the SBDC after learning about its services from other organizations and individuals.

Strengths according to IAO: The SBDC has years of experience in helping inventors and functions as an information broker.

Kean University, Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Union, New Jersey

Web site: www.njsbdc.com

Mission: To assist individuals to either grow existing businesses or start their own business.

Founded: 1989

How was it started? SBDCs were created through an Act of Congress in 1977.

Leadership structure: The SBDC is connected with the university leadership structure and the U.S. Small Business Administration.

How is it funded? The center is funded by the SBA with the State of New Jersey providing matching funding and some support comes from host institutions.

How does it operate? The center offers free counseling and free or low cost training to entrepreneurs.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? The center identifies new clients via referral from other inventor clients.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization provides free consulting by experts in various fields.

Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB) Economic Development District

Kenai, Alaska

Web site: www.borough.kenai.ak.us/Econ/EconomicIndicators/default.htm

Mission: To serve as a resource for small businesses.

Founded: 1983

How was it started? It was a part of an economic development organization that initially applied for federal funding through the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

Leadership structure: Organization has a board of directors that includes representatives from municipalities, boroughs, etc., and two full-time staff members (director and program manager).

How is it funded? Grants come from the federal, state, and municipal governments. “Soft financing” is a third of the program budget.

How does it operate? Only organization that focuses on regional based economic development. There is no other competition.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? The organization receives clients often through word-of-mouth. Other agencies such as commercial banks refer potential clients who are interested in starting a business.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization is flexible in all programs offered. Micro-loan program offers no hassle way to get financing.

LAW Maine Patent Program

Portland, Maine

Web site: www.maineipatent.org/

Mission: To support economic development by helping Maine inventors and small businesses understand how to identify and protect their intellectual property.

Founded: 2001

How was it started? The organization was originated through an act from the state legislature in 2000.

Leadership Structure: The Maine Patent Program is administered by the Center for Law and Innovation of the University of Maine School of Law. The dean of the law school heads the program. There are two directors (one IP attorney / adjunct professor and one patent attorney), a senior patent advisor (who is a patent attorney), a patent advisor (who is a patent agent), and an administrative manager. All of the program workers are technically university employees. The organization is supported by two full-time employees.

How is it funded? Initially the patent program was funded with a separate line item from the state legislature; now the program has its own account within the university system.

How does it operate? It operates as a free law clinic with law consultants and some students who are in law school at the University. It serves as a resource for information and education on the patent process and other means of intellectual property protection to help inventors learn what needs to be done to obtain and

maintain legal rights to their ideas, and to provide assistance with the patent process to those who qualify. It provides legal services for clients including legal education and assistance to Maine citizens and companies related to patenting issues (may include patent searching, patentability analysis, and strategic discussions on related patenting issues). The program offers numerous free public seminars and workshops, which give individuals an opportunity to network, discuss, and learn about patenting and other intellectual property matters.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Independent inventors discover the program through the Web site, seminars, and the university. The program's reputation attracts inventors through word-of-mouth, SBDCs, the Maine Technology Institute (provides seed funding), and private practitioners.

Strengths according to IAO: The program's free legal clinic provides a variety of expertise from legal professionals and law students. Also, the program has the capacity to send particular inventions to be evaluated by experts within the university.

Minnesota Inventors Congress

Redwood Falls, Minnesota

Web site: www.inventhelper.org

Mission: To support and provide opportunities for inventors to become educated in the invention and research process, and to teach the inventor how to identify reliable resources.

Founded: 1958

How was it started? A group of farmers and businessmen in late 1957 or early 1958 hosted an annual event intended to provide a haven for inventors to have an opportunity to market, manufacture new products, network with other inventors, and bring / attract new businesses. The objective was to prevent brain drain; there was a need to find ways to keep the young people in the region.

Leadership structure: Organization has two paid full-time staff positions including an executive director, and it is volunteer-driven. An advisory council is composed of representatives from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), local business incubator, economic development community, and Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and successful inventors.

How is it funded? The organization is a non-profit funded through state, county, and city appropriations, and also collects exhibitor fees and community and business/organization donations.

How does it operate? The operations are continually evolving. The organization hosts annual events and offers seminars, and it sends members updates about different Inventor Associations, contests, the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office, etc. It also provides an inventor tool kit that contains an invention development checklist and explains how to avoid scam companies. The advisory council is involved in providing inventing success seminars.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? The organization has earned brand recognition (founded approximately 40 years ago) and also maintains a database of inventor contacts. An 800 toll-free number is very helpful for inventors seeking to gain access to and learn more about the organization. Inventors learn about

the organization when it hosts an Inventor's expo and/or at trade shows. The SBA and SBDC refer potential clients.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization does not charge for services so as to make the events affordable to inventors. The Inventors Congress has been able to build integrity because there is no conflict of interest, and inventors trust the organization.

National Society of Inventors

Rosselle Park, New Jersey

Web site: www.nsinventors.com

Mission: To create a platform for inventors helping inventors.

Founded: 1977

How was it started? Inventors were getting together to help one another conduct patent searches and accessing the Patent & Trademark Depository Library. During this time, these types of searches were difficult because the Internet was not available. Eventually, this evolved into the creation of a patent club / inventor organization.

Leadership structure: Organization is led by officers including a president, vice president, and treasurer, as well as trustees.

How is it funded? The organization is funded through its \$50 annual membership fees, paid by 30 members.

How does it operate? The National Society of Inventors host monthly meetings with speakers and pre-meeting networking.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? There is a limit to the amount of time allotted to finding inventors because inventors find the organization. The Web site is well-ranked and is included on the United Inventors Association member list.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization gives candid feedback and honest evaluations, and it explains the invention process.

New York Society of Professional Inventors

Massapequa, New York

Web site: www.geocities.com/nyspi2001

Mission: Provide a networking opportunity for inventors and service suppliers (lawyers, prototype makers, and marketers).

Founded: 1983

How was it started? The State University of New York at Farmingdale assistant dean and its School of Mechanical Engineering supplied resources to create a group for inventors. Eventually, the group separated from the university, and branched off to become an independent entity.

Leadership structure: Organization has a board of directors and the following officers: president, program chairman, treasurer and secretary.

How is it funded? The annual membership fee is \$55. Guests are invited and can donate \$10 at the door, which goes towards the rental costs for the meeting facility.

How does it operate? The society hosts monthly meetings to encourage networking between inventors. Speakers have a range of expertise (e.g., lawyers and marketing professionals).

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Inventors contact the organization upon learning about it through word -of -mouth and by visiting Web sites of the organization and the United Inventors Association.

Strengths according to IAO: The organization provides very informative speakers talking on interesting and applicable topics.

**Sierra College Small Business Development Center (SBDC):
Manufacturers' Assistance Program (MAP)**
Rocklin, California

Web site: <http://www.sierracollege training.com/cact.php>

Mission: To support companies with employer training, technology deployment, and industry development.

Founded: 1997; the Manufacturers' Assistance Program was revamped in January 2007.

How was it started? It is one of 15 Economic and Workforce Development Program Centers for Applied Competitive Technologies (CACTs) funded through the Chancellor's office in California. The CACT initiative focuses on community colleges.

Leadership structure: The dean of workforce development oversees this program. An advisory committee includes city representatives, city partners and others who have an interest in manufacturing and technology.

How is it funded? The organization is funded by in-kind grants that require the college to match the given amounts.

How does it operate? Through a collaborative process, it works with grades K-12 and the business community (sole proprietors, small businesses, and inventors). Consultants give training, free assistance, and advice on product development, using solid modeling and rapid prototyping. Individuals who complete the program learn through workshops, demonstration sites (involving tools and techniques), and hands-on training to understand how to get from product to profit.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? The program is branded and its reputation attracts inventors. It benefits from a portal of inventors who have used the program as established clients refer others. The program also receives referrals from SBDC and benefits from individuals who discover services through the Web site. In addition, CACT is a collaborative partnership with other community colleges throughout the state, which provides a whole referral system where each CACT has a different specialization.

Strengths according to IAO: The program includes a group of consultants who are engaged in what they do, have industry and/or faculty expertise, and provide specific advice.

Tampa Bay Inventors' Council (TBIC)

Largo, Florida

Web site: <http://tbic.us/>

Mission: To educate and provide networking opportunities for inventors so they can benefit from their peers' expertise and advice.

Founded: 1982

How was it started? Two founders (one was a patent attorney) saw a need for an inventors organization in the region.

Leadership structure: Organization has a board of directors (limit of nine members). Everyone on the board is a volunteer.

How is it funded? The not-for-profit corporation was created exclusively for charitable, educational, and scientific purposes. Expenses are covered by member dues. There are four classes of membership: annual membership (\$90.), semi-annual membership (\$50), corporate membership (\$250) and student membership (\$25). Retired members tend to donate to the [corporation] council?.

How does it operate? TBIC conducts meetings on the second and fourth Wednesday every month at the same time (from 7 to 9 PM) for a group of inventors who network and support each other.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? TBIC is 25 years old and it has a brand name that attracts inventors through reputation. It disseminates pamphlets at the local university and operates a Web site. The organization and some of its inventors are also on YouTube and on ABC's local affiliate "American Inventor" program.

Strengths according to IAO: TBIC gives advice to inventors on next steps that do not necessarily require they spend a fortune. TBIC focuses on getting them attainable results.

The Technology Advocates of San Antonio and Inventors & Entrepreneurs Special Interest Group (TASA I&E SIG)

San Antonio, Texas

Web site: www.tasa.org

Mission: To serve as a compass, resource, and inspiration for inventors and entrepreneurs as they launch their concepts to market.

Founded: 1999

How was it started? The Inventors & Entrepreneurs Special Interest Group was composed of a few inventors who attended monthly meetings at a restaurant until 2001. One member became aware of the Technology Advocates of San Antonio, which

agreed to take the small inventors group under its umbrella and hold meetings in a more formal setting.

Leadership structure: Technology Advocates of San Antonio is the umbrella organization. There is an advisory committee, which consists of 11 to 12 volunteers and officers including president, vice president, and treasurer.

How is it funded? Membership is \$15 per year. Meeting / facility space is provided to the organization at no cost.

How does it operate? TASA I&E SIG provides monthly meetings where members can meet and discuss their ideas, problems, and solutions; talk with community resource members, and hear guest speakers talk about their real- world experiences. It provides a forum where this information may be shared and discussed to expand and educate the membership of the group. Additional on-line resources are available to help direct inventors and entrepreneurs to local and national organizations that can help them move concept from idea to market. A retired medical doctor is a mentor to inventors. Patent attorneys (one who comes to meetings regularly and another who is on call), a University of Texas professor, and others provide support. The University of Texas San Antonio (UTSA)'s Economic Development Center and TASA I&E SIG work together to assist independent inventors, free of charge, in conducting patent searches among other aspects.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? TASA I&E SIG relies on its Web site to market the organization. The IAO has a member e-mail blast and a non-member list with individuals who attend meetings. Advertisements are placed in the *San Antonio Express* newspaper and *San Antonio Business Journal* about monthly meetings (speakers, times, etc). There is no fee to place advertisements in newspapers.

Strengths according to IAO: Inventors helping inventors is the main focus. Money is not the focus (membership dues are very low). Mentoring and advice help get inventors oriented toward the invention process (from concept to market).

United Inventors Association (UIA)

Henrietta, New York

Web site: www.uiausa.org

Mission: To coordinate individual inventors and inventor organizations to address issues and provide information and support.

Founded: 1990

How was it started? The organization started as an outgrowth of a conference sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy.

Leadership structure: Organization has a board of directors.

How is it funded? The organization is funded through membership dues (\$97 per individual, \$225 per organization) and sponsorship funds.

How does it operate? UIA is the national umbrella organization for inventor associations located across the United States and provides free information and

educational materials for public consumption. Additional in-depth materials and services are available to members. UIA members include national and international inventor groups, individual inventors, entrepreneurs, academics, commercial enterprises, service providers, and non-profit companies.

How are independent inventors needing help are identified? Inventors find the UIA through the media, Internet, and word- of- mouth.

Strengths according to IAO: UIA provides reliable information and resource connections.

USTAR Innovation and Economic Development at Weber State University

Ogden, Utah

Web site: www.ustar.utah.gov

Mission: To promote and encourage local commercialization of discoveries and technologies emanating from the state's public research universities to regional applied technology centers, colleges, businesses, and entrepreneurs.

Founded: September 2006

How was it started? Business leaders in 2005 who met informally were alarmed by the trend of high- tech jobs in state, which seemed to get bought out and relocated. The leaders presented information about the issue to the governor of Utah, then received money from the legislature to conduct the study with a consulting firm that put work groups together. The consulting firm gathered documentation of best practices of organizations across the country. In 2006, the legislation passed to fund the USTAR Initiative.

Leadership structure: Organization has a board of directors (which includes a private-sector bank president, venture capitalists, technology start-up investors, and a representative of one of the state's largest aerospace employers, and representatives from the public sector (mostly university people) and an independent state agency (who thereafter serves as executive director). Five technology outreach directors (who were chosen due to their private- sector experience) are responsible for specific regions. [MBA] graduate and undergraduate students provide support.

How is it funded? State of Utah.

How does it operate? The entire Utah University System is involved in the USTAR program, which encourages research collaborations led by two flagship universities in Utah: the University of Utah and Utah State University. One major initiative called SEED is taking place in Weber, Davis, and Morgan counties. The purpose of the project is to establish a baseline regarding how successful the USTAR program is by analyzing the high- potential start-ups and identifying significant gaps. This analysis measures the sustainability of new pipelines created, how developed are the venture capital, business angels, and talent pools, and the significance of the balance of training materials, patent attorneys, etc. USTAR provides help with patent filings, prototyping and product development, start up support, assistance with creating business plans, and preparation for investor presentations.

How are independent inventors needing help are identified? USTAR does not actively market. The organization includes technology outreach directors located

throughout the state to share information on USTAR's services. Many inventors hear about USTAR's services through referrals.

Strengths According to IAO: There is a mix of skills on the team (e.g. expertise ranging from strategy and marketing, start-ups and venture finance, to molecular biology, composite materials, and aerospace.) The USTAR team uses a scorecard for recording progress to the board of directors.

Wisconsin Innovation Service Center; University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Whitewater, Wisconsin

Web site: <http://academics.uww.edu/business/innovate/>

Mission: To provide help inventors, manufacturers, and entrepreneurs make profitable new products and market decisions.

Founded: 1981

How was it started? The organization is linked to University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Business School and is a specialty center for the Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

Leadership structure: Organization has a director, market research manager, report editor, graduate students, and ad hoc volunteers.

How is it funded? Client fees and some funding through the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

How does it operate? The Wisconsin Innovation Center helps inventors evaluate the market success of their products. The work is linked with manufacturing partners nationwide. The center is involved with the College of Business and works with the Fiscal Economic Research Center. It collaborates through teleconferences, statewide SBDC monthly meetings, associations, and trade shows. The center maintains a database of inventors, and staff conduct feasibility studies for inventors who sign non-disclosure agreements. The center also issues lab publications.

How are independent inventors needing help identified? Inventors come to the organization when they discover services through the Web site, *Entrepreneur Magazine*, and *The Wallstreet Journal*. Approximately 80 percent of business comes through referrals (SBDC, 'mom'preneurs, patent attorneys, manufacturers' partnerships, and magazines).

Strengths according to IAO: The organization provides third-party market research through a standard format (overview of competition, preliminary technical evaluation, preliminary patent research, and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). This format is used to help with a business plan.

A CLOSER LOOK AT GEORGIA

Substantial evidence shows how IAOs all over the country share the mission of advancing productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurship among independent inventors and other individuals within their service areas. The state of Georgia is no exception.

Georgia has extensive resources statewide in academia, and the public and private sectors. These resources could contribute significant value to a more formalized network for supporting the state's independent inventors. Following are some of these resources:

- ☐ **Chambers of Commerce:** Georgia is home to 173 local chambers of commerce.
- ☐ **Georgia Department of Economic Development:** The Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) is the state's sales and marketing arm, the lead agency for attracting new business investment, encouraging the expansion of existing industry and small businesses, locating new markets for Georgia products, attracting tourists to Georgia, and promoting the state as a location for film, video and music projects, as well as planning and mobilizing state resources for economic development. GDEcD runs the state's Georgia Centers of Innovation which are located throughout the state, connecting industry to university and college expertise in aerospace, agriculture, life sciences, maritime logistics, and manufacturing.
- ☐ **Georgia Research Alliance (GRA):** The partnership between Georgia's research universities, the business community, and state government has the mission to create science- and technology-driven economic development and to stimulate growth in the state.
- ☐ **Inventors Association of Georgia:** This association is a critical resource to the independent inventor because its main mission is to help promote invention and innovation.
- ☐ **Patent and Trademark Depository Library:** Located in Atlanta, Georgia Tech's Price Gilbert Memorial Library, provides public access to patent and trademark information received from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). This information includes all issued patents, all registered trademarks, the *Official Gazette* of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, search tools such as the Cassis CD-ROM suite of products and supplemental information in a variety of formats including online, optical disc, microfilm and paper.
- ☐ **Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Program:** This program encourages small businesses to explore their technological potential and provides the incentive to profit from commercialization. By including qualified small businesses in the nation's R&D arena, high-tech innovation is stimulated and the United States fosters entrepreneurial spirit as it meets its specific research and development needs. Georgia's program is run by the Georgia Tech Enterprise Innovation Institute.
- ☐ **Service Corp of Retired Executives (SCORE):** This is America's premier source of free and confidential small- business advice for entrepreneurs.

- ☐ **Technical College System of Georgia:** The Technical College System of Georgia is a unified system of technical education, custom business and industry training and adult education. Our programs use the best available technology and offer easy access to lifelong learning for all Georgians. This system is part of a seamless education process for Georgia in which students can transfer credits efficiently as they advance from secondary schools to technical colleges and to the university system.

- ☐ **University System of Georgia:**

Columbus State University's Columbus Regional Technology Incubator (CRTI): non-profit organization dedicated to housing and nurturing new companies.

East Georgia College's Georgia Rural Economic Development Center (GREDC): supports programs in entrepreneur outreach and economic development in rural Georgia.

Georgia State's CollabTech Biotechnology Incubator: a new Atlanta-based \$250 million dollar research park encompassing technology licensing, company start-up assistance, consulting services, and the Russell Entrepreneurship Center, that teaches entrepreneurs how to start and grow business.

Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovation Institute: offers commercialization services to help move innovations from Georgia Tech labs to the marketplace; entrepreneur services to help support the state's entrepreneurs; and industry services to work with Georgia manufacturers to help them compete in the global marketplace. Housed within this organization is Georgia Tech's Advanced Technology Development Center (ATDC) which operates programs of assistance to early-stage technology companies.

Gordon College: surveys business owners and provides the services they request.

Medical College of Georgia's Life Sciences Business Incubator Center: a start-up facility for biotechnology companies with wet lab requirements.

Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs): an intricate network of SBDCs located throughout the state. While most of them are affiliated with the University of Georgia, there are some affiliated with other state universities (e.g., Clayton State, Georgia State). They assist existing and prospective business owners to start or grow a business by offering a wide variety of training, providing one-on-one consulting, conducting economic development- related market research, and providing technical assistance.

The Edge Connection at Kennesaw State University: Provides micro-enterprise training and development, and is one of 90 Small Business Administration Women Business Centers in the country.

University of Georgia's Center for Applied Genetic Technologies (CAGT): features state-of-the-art laboratories and equipment for UGA faculty conducting genomics research on agriculturally important plants and animals such as peanuts, pine trees and chicken.

CONCLUSION

The needs of the independent inventor community are diverse and largely unmet, not only in Georgia but nationwide, according to the Inventor Assistance Organizations (IAOs) reviewed in this investigation. What these IAOs have realized is that inventors are part of the nation's human capital landscape, its communities, regions, and states. Regarding Georgia, there is now no organization or entity in the state focused on addressing the needs of the independent inventor, although there are some impressive efforts within some of the key universities to assist faculty inventors with various commercialization paths. However, the vacuum of assistance for the independent inventor begs the question regarding whether Georgia is missing out on some untapped potential for transforming the creative capital located in pockets across the state into some higher economic development value.

This review of the IAOs who have had some practice in serving independent inventors provides a framework for how to structure a potential program in Georgia. Georgia's diverse resources could contribute to an operative support network for independent inventors under some type of coordinating umbrella. This umbrella could likely benefit from partnerships with the case study IAOs located across the United States.

The results of this research are offered for review, in conjunction with the results of the *2007 Survey of Georgia's Independent Inventors*, for future exploration in the potential development of a formal program to assist independent inventors in Georgia.

APPENDIX

Interview Guide for Inventor Assistance Organizations

Date: []	Interviewer: []
Contact Name: []	Organization: []
Location (city, state): []	Web Site: []
Email: []	Phone: []

1. Does your organization provide assistance to independent inventors - that is, inventors who are not affiliated with a corporation, university, or other entity?

- ☐ Yes, continue interview
- ☐ No, stop interview and thank them for their time.

2. What is the mission of your organization/program?

3. Please tell me the background of your organization.

- a. How was it started?

- b. When did it start?

- c. What is its leadership structure?

- d. How is it funded?

- e. How does it operate?

- f. What is your role?

4. How long has your organization served independent inventors?

5. What types of products do you see from inventors you've helped?

- ☐ Aerospace
- ☐ Agriscience
- ☐ Automotive
- ☐ Business & Financial Services
- ☐ Chemical
- ☐ Consumer Products
- ☐ Energy, Environmental
- ☐ Homeland Security
- ☐ Pharmaceuticals and Biotech
- ☐ Logistics, Transportation
- ☐ Medical Devices and Equipment
- ☐ Other Healthcare
- ☐ Multimedia
- ☐ Nanotechnology
- ☐ Software
- ☐ Telecommunications

Other Type(s) of Products:

6. What types of services and programs does your organization/program provide for independent inventors in your service area? *(check all categories that apply)*

	Yes	No
Third Party Evaluation		
• Technical Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Intellectual Property Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Commercial Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Literature Review		
• Scientific/Technical Literature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technical/Scientific Assistance Or Advice		
• Design	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Prototyping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Product or Process Testing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intellectual Property Assistance or Advice		
• Patent or Trademark Search	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Legal Consultation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Patent Application	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Trademark Registration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Assistance Or Advice		
• Licensing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Planning / Roadmapping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Marketing and Sales | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Manufacturing | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Human Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Information Technology | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Financing | | |
| • Advice on Obtaining Financing | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Access to Financing Sources | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Incubator Services | | |
| • Access to Facilities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Management and Technical Assistance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other Type(s) of Assistance:

7. What are the top three requests for help from inventors using/inquiring about your services?

1.

2.

3.

8. How do you identify independent inventors to help in your region?

9. How many independent inventors do you serve per month?

10. What are the strengths of your services that assist/support the inventors?

11. Are there aspects of your services to assist/support inventors that need improvement? If, yes, please describe.

12. How do you market your organizations and services?

a. Do you have a website that lists these services and their objectives?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, please provide address:

b. Do you have any marketing brochures or informational fact sheets on your services for inventors that you can provide to us?

☐ Yes

☐ No

13. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not accessible and 5 = very accessible), do you consider your organization/program an *accessible resource* for inventors?

Not
Accessible

Very
Accessible

One
☐

Two
☐

Three
☐

Four
☐

Five
☐

Please explain reasons for your rating:

14. How do you evaluate the success of your services? What are your metrics?

15. Do you have an annual report or other report that demonstrates your success that you can share with us?

16. What do you consider to be the top three greatest challenges in serving inventors?

1.

2.

3.

17. What the top three lessons you've learned from your experiences in serving inventors?

1.

2.

3.

18. What are your top three suggestions for organizations wishing to create a new program to assist independent inventors?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

19. Do you partner with other organizations to identify, contact, and support inventors in your region/state? Which ones? Name, contact, phone, etc??

20. Do you refer independent inventors to other organizations that meet their specific needs? Which ones? Name, contact, phone, etc??

21. Beyond those you partner with or make referrals to, are there other organizations you're aware of that provide services to independent inventors? If so, who are they? (Where else should we look for best practices in innovator assistance?)

22. Any other comments to share with us?